

## TIME troubles divide consultant community

By **Evan Brown**

Category: [Governor](#), LocalTags: [Tom Ziemba](#), [Jeanine L'Ecuyer](#), [Janet Napolitano](#), [Jan Brewer](#), [David Waid](#), [Connie Wilhelm](#), [Chuck Coughlin](#), [Andrew Chavez](#)

As the TIME Coalition tries to fight its way back onto the ballot through the courts, there are a lot of questions being asked about how the Coalition - backed by Gov. **Janet Napolitano** and supported by some of the top political consultancy firms in Arizona - found itself in this position.

The Coalition is trying to put a 1 cent sales tax increase before voters to pay for improvements in transportation infrastructure - an initiative the governor considers vital for Arizona's future. Yet Secretary of State **Jan Brewer** invalidated a large number of signatures collected to get on the ballot, and unless the Arizona Supreme Court rules otherwise, TIME will not appear before voters in November.

Much of the blame is being placed with Ziemba Wade, the relatively new but high profile consulting firm that was ultimately in charge of the campaign. Though not many political insiders are speaking publicly, behind the scenes there is talk that Ziemba Wade failed its first major test as a power in Arizona politics.

The firm is owned by **Tom Ziemba**, who was chief of staff for the New Hampshire presidential primary campaign of former U.S. Sen John Edwards (D-N.C.), and **David Waid**, who left his position as chair of the Arizona Democratic Party to co-found the firm.

Despite the impressive credentials, there are some who question Ziemba Wade's ability to run a campaign like TIME.

One of those people is Chuck Coughlin, president of HighGround, the consulting firm that was originally spearheading the TIME Coalition but dropped the campaign after he felt Ziemba Waid was encroaching on HighGround's leadership.

"Part of the reason we stepped aside is because we didn't agree with their choices" of vendors, said Coughlin. In particular, he said, the selection of Petition Partners, the signature gathering outfit headed by Andrew Chavez, caused the split between HighGround and TIME.

"[Ziemba Waid] are not a petition gathering firm," said Coughlin. "They contacted Chavez to do most of their work. I have not used that firm in the past and have concerns with their business practices. Ziemba Waid was very gung-ho about using the people they wanted."

Coughlin said he thought much of the problem lay with Ziemba Waid not doing an adequate review to ensure a high validity rate ahead of time. However, he also said he thought the initiative would still get balloted.

"We'll see if this is ultimately a failure," he said. "I'm still fairly skeptical it's not going to appear on the ballot. I'm sure they're going to mount every legal argument they can muster." He added, "I don't want to leave people with the impression it's underwater permanently."

Still, the frustration Coughlin enunciated is echoed by many others who won't go on the record, for fear of alienating the governor and her allies.

The biggest criticism being leveled at Ziemba Waid is that the firm wanted to run things its own way, without help or input from others. These critics point to the situation with the Home Builders Association of Central Arizona as evidence that Ziemba Waid's hubris brought down the effort, at least temporarily.

Back in May, the HBACA made a deal with TIME, facilitated by the governor's intervention, through which the home builders put up \$100,000 toward the campaign, including signature gathering of their own. In exchange for funding, they secured the expurgation of a provision in the initiative that would have made developers responsible for impact fees that would go toward the transportation fund.

The HBACA collected the signatures, but those signatures weren't included when Ziemba Waid filed with the secretary of state.

"We delivered them to the Ziemba Wade office, and they were returned by the Ziemba Wade office," said [Connie Wilhelm](#), executive director of the HBACA. "We sent a letter to [lobbyist and TIME founder] Marty Schultz advising him they were in my office a couple of days before they filed their signatures. The governor's office was copied on that as well. They are still in my office."

When asked why she thought Ziemba Waid refused the more than 18,000 signatures the HBACA had gathered, Wilhelm said:

"Early on, they had mentioned that they believed we were not quote authorized to collect signatures on their behalf, and then later said they were verifying theirs as they went along, and they felt theirs were somehow better than mine, or that mine might have been a problem."

Wilhelm wouldn't place blame directly on Ziemba Waid, saying, "I don't know who made the decision on behalf of the campaign." Still, she added, "it certainly appears that it would have been prudent for them to take [the signatures]."

There's another side to the debate, though. The TIME Coalition and the governor's office both assert that the signatures were wrongly invalidated by Secretary of State Jan Brewer, and backers of TIME's strategy privately say the decision was politically motivated, as Brewer is speculated to be eyeing the governor's mansion in 2010.

Kate Hutchinson, speaking on behalf of the TIME Coalition, said that the initiative campaign did its job. "The problem is with the secretary of state, not us," she said.

Her assessment was reiterated by [Jeanine L'Ecuyer](#), spokeswoman for Gov. Napolitano.

"I'm not a big fan of placing blame," said L'Ecuyer. "We think, however, there were mistakes made with the secretary of state's office."

L'Ecuyer did blame Chuck Coughlin for much of what was being said about TIME falling short.

"He didn't want to be involved in it, and now for whatever reason he's trying to stir some gunk around it," L'Ecuyer said.

She did agree with his assessment that the initiative could be revived, though.

"It's not over," said L'Ecuyer. "There's a lot more to come."

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